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ABSTRACT

This paper presents, describes, and explains the results of Project SIGN (a school improvement groups network) collaboratively conducted by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the Camp Lejeune Dependents' Schools during the 1989-90 school year. The collegial, professional in-service program, designed to improve school effectiveness and student outcomes, utilized SIGN teams that included a site administrator, teachers, and representatives from higher education and central education administration. Four schools participated in the project, which was evaluated by case study analysis, interviews, observation, a teacher and principal survey, and document analysis. Findings indicate that each school achieved its goals and that principals improved their leadership strategies. Results included reduced teacher isolation, increased collaboration, and improved instruction. Problem areas involved the roles of the principal, superintendent, and central office. Evaluation of informal outcomes indicates increased participant learning, curriculum improvement, and energizing effects of change. Three tables and examples of program agenda, program activities, and evaluation forms are included. (33 references) (LMI)

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SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GROUPS NETWORK

(SIGN) 7/89-6/90

A Plan to Improve School-Based Decisions

A project funded by the Small Grants School-Based

Research Program, 1989-90.

Conducted cooperatively through the University of North Carolina

at Greensboro (UNCG), School of Education

and

Camp Lejeune Dependent Schools (CLDS)

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SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT:
IT'S IN *YOUR* HANDS.

Paper presented at the Southern Regional Council on

Educational Administration (SRCEA). Atlanta, GA. 11/12/90

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ABSTRACT

Project SIGN was a year-long school-site improvement process conducted in four schools of one system. A School Improvement Groups Network (SIGN) team included a site-level administrator, several teachers, and higher education, central office and other resource persons cooperating in school improvement. SIGN provided collegial, focused, professional in-service to refine schooling processes and pupil outcomes. Each SIGN established a goal, "gameplans" or incremental steps, and operating procedures. Major, positive and lasting changes resulted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Proposers of the School Improvement Groups Network (SIGN) project were fortunate to implement the project in the Camp Lejeune Dependents' Schools System. Dr. E. Conrad Sloan, Superintendent, supported this project from the very beginning. Dr. Sloan has the curiosity and the courage to support thoughtful risk-taking by members of the school system. SIGN benefited from the commitment of resources that Dr. Sloan made possible and from his personal interest and active participation. Dr. Duane L. Linker, Associate Superintendent, provided critical advice and assistance with the financial and personnel aspects of SIGN. Dr. Wesley Guthrie, Director of Staff Development and Personnel Services, recognized SIGN as a viable in-service approach and provided technical assistance to the project. A special thanks to Dr. Norman Brooks, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Dr. Mary Beth Poole, Testing Coordinator, and all Central Office Coordinators who participated in the SIGN meetings. The teachers and administrators who formed the original SIGN deserve that special recognition reserved for frontline participants. They accepted the challenges and risks of leadership; SIGN was a success because of them.

One SIGN goal was to develop a network of people dedicated to improving education. That network included University of North Carolina at Greensboro faculty and others. Dr. Dale Brubaker brought not only a rich background in curriculum and leadership to SIGN but also long-term experience with school-based research in the Camp Lejeune schools. Dr. Ed Bell of East Carolina University provided practical and theoretical insights into essential topics, such as strategic planning, organizational culture, program evaluation, and consensus building. Dr. John Keedy of West Georgia College shared his work on Teacher Collegial Groups which provided the seed that eventually grew into SIGN.

SIGN is a successful school improvement process implemented in an outstanding school system. The strength of both is an awareness that they can be even better.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GROUPS NETWORK or SIGN (7/89-6/90)*

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

OVERVIEW

This is a final report for a 1989-90 Small Grants School-Based research study conducted jointly by personnel from the Camp Lejeune Dependent Schools (CLDS) and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). Direct funding was provided by the UNC Small Grants program; Camp Lejeune Schools provided substitute pay and some logistical support. The project, originally designated "School Teams Collegial Groups," became called Project SIGN for School Improvement Groups Network, as a result of decisions at the first project meeting.

The role of principal as instructional leader and the emergence of site-based management (SBM) are two challenges facing school leaders (Achilles, 1989; Brubaker, 1985; Williams, 1988; NASSP New Leader, 1987; Vann, Novotney & Knaub, 1977). In-service programs can assist school leaders in responding to these challenges, but according to Daresh (1987), in-service programs in schools "are often perceived as a 'necessary evil' that is 'done to' people once in a while, in much the same way that the oil in the family car must be changed every few thousand miles." Daresh and LaPlant (1984) list 12 guidelines for designing effective in-service programs, including that effective in-service addresses local school and participant needs; actively involves participants in planning, implementing and evaluating programs; employs active learning processes (rather than passive techniques such as lectures); is part of a long-term systematic staff development plan; enables participants to share ideas and assist one another; is provided during school time, and is accompanied by ongoing evaluation.

Collegial groups can provide a setting for collaboration between college/university faculty and public school teachers. College/university personnel provide improvement models, assist in implementing and adapting the models, disseminate findings and incorporate new ideas from

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* C.M. Achilles, Professor, Education Administration, School of Education, UNC-Greensboro, 27412-5001, and Pat Gaines, Observer/Evaluator, CLDS, Marine Base, Jacksonville, NC 28542-5005. More detail is in the project Final Report and an additional paper by the same authors that discusses SIGN as a vehicle for planned change.

practice into their preparation programs. Teachers identify problem areas and provide mutual support and advice as they work collaboratively to devise and implement improvement plans (Joyce, et al., 1989; Keedy, 1988, 1989). One challenge of Site-Based Management (SBM) such as offered by Senate Bill 2 (SB2) in North Carolina is to modify the principal's role to include shared decision making (teacher empowerment) and instructional leadership. School collegial groups that include building-level administrators will allow principals to learn strategies for instructional leadership from teachers. These groups have potential to encourage the teacher as decision maker (Keedy, 1988, 1989), promote professionalization (Joyce, et al., 1989), flatten out the bureaucratic structure, and meet the guidelines suggested by Daresh and LaPlant (1984) for effective in-service education.

RESEARCH DESIGN/METHOD

This quasi-experimental study employed a "one-shot" pre/post design and equivalent (to the degree possible) control or comparison groups [Campbell and Stanley (1963), design #3]. The treatment for administrators was the inservice and practice in conducting collegial group processes (to attain skill in instructional leadership) and (for teachers) the inservice, participation in, and use of results of collegial group work to practice teacher shared decision-making and implementation of carefully planned changes in individual classrooms. Research methodology was a mixture of qualitative and quantitative techniques, including interview data, field notes, questionnaire results from both teachers and principals, direct observation, and archival measures (e.g. changes in student or teacher attendance, decreases in disciplinary actions, etc.).

PROBLEM SETTING

School reform initiatives are a fact of life for educators. Some say that the reforms of the 1980's were "waves," the first wave aimed at pupils, the second at teachers, and the third at administrators and the organization of schools. Griffiths, Stout and Forsyth (1988) refer to a "revolution in the way schools are organized," call for a change in the relationship between

teachers and administrators, and recommend innovations in the preparation of education administrators (p. xiii).

The North Carolina School Board Association and the Public School Forum, in a briefing paper discussing North Carolina's "site-based management" legislation (Senate Bill 2 and House Bill 1510), "consider the bill the beginning of a quiet revolution that could profoundly change and improve our method of managing schools" (1989, p. 1). They point out that "mandated, top-down reforms" have not been successful and that "voluntary, local reform programs that have the support of educators and the communities they serve hold far greater potential to create meaningful and positive long-term change" (p. 2).

While SBM has been enabled in North Carolina by Senate Bill 2, school personnel still need to develop and implement their own individual district or school improvement plans. The reform initiatives provide answers to <u>what</u> must be done for school reform (e.g., SBM), but do not tell educators much about <u>how</u> to do it. Some suggestions for implementing SBM can be found in current literature on school reform. Marburger (1985) offers an overview of SBM with suggestions for initiating the process in school systems. He stresses the importance of building-level decision making and participation in decision making by all of those concerned with the local school. In discussing SBM research, David (1989) also points out that the rationale for SBM is based on school autonomy and a process of shared decision making within the school. Timar (1989) in a review of school restructuring, says:

> In order for restructuring to succeed as a reform strategy it must change not only local bureaucratic structures and state policy environments, but also the nature and tone of the conversation about schooling. Teachers must be trained and socialized to assume different responsibilities. They must become skilled in evaluation and organizational planning.

Conley and Bacharach (1990) differentiate between a bureaucratic approach to SBM in which building administrators make most decisions and a participatory approach in which teachers have a greater voice in decision making. "The issue is not simply how to achieve school-site management but how to achieve collegial and collective management at the school level" (p. 540).

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this study, a SIGN was defined as a group made up of school-site teams consisting of a building-level administrator and three to seven teachers, and supported by higher education and central office personnel working collaboratively to improve schools. "Site" is defined as a single school within a school system. "Site-based" goals are those goals uniquely identified by personnel within a single school as important for that school's improvement.

PURPOSES OF THE PAPER (OVERVIEW)

This paper presents, describes and explains the results of a school improvement project funded through the Small Grants School-Based Research Program in the Camp Lejeune Dependents' Schools (CLDS) during the 1989-90 school year. The project was a collaborative effort between the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and CLDS. Formally, there were an initial planning session (October), a two-day retreat in November 1989 followed by one-day sessions for the entire group approximately one month apart and some single-group sessions and on-site visitations by consultants. Communication between CLDS and UNCG was frequent.

Project SIGN was an adaptation of some teacher collegial group (TCG) activities successfully employed in Georgia (Keedy, 1988; Joyce, et al., 1989). Keedy's (1988, 1989) TCG activities included only teachers, as Keedy believed that an administrator in the group would discourage free exchange or dominate. Project SIGN involved one site-level administrator as a regular member of each group. The decision to involve an administrator in each group was based on several factors: (1) research showing that the principal is a key factor in school improvement (e.g., effective schools research), (2) studies showing that innovation and change in schools are not likely to occur without the support of the building leader (e.g., Berman and McLaughlin, 1974); (3) studies from the Texas R&D Center on a second change facilitator, (4) participative/collegial decision making research, and (5) expanded access to information and ideas. Much of the theoretic basis for SIGN comes from

recent ideas about teacher professionalism, site-based management (SBM) and participative decision making, education change processes, and inservice or professional development activities.

METHOD

CONTEXT/SETTING FOR SIGN

The Camp Lejeune Dependents' Schools (CLDS) have not only a long history of working with UNCG faculty, but the schools themselves have a history of excellence and of being in the forefront of educational improvement. Although at the outset of SIGN there was no direct mandate for site-based management (SBM), the CLDS had already established teams at the local school level, initiated some strategic planning steps, and developed their own pool of administrators through sabbatical leaves and internship experiences. Thus, the setting of Project SIGN at CLDS helped the project succeed.

The Camp Lejeune Dependents' Schools are operated by the Department of Defense and the United States Marine Corps in accordance with standards of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The school system serves 3700 students K-12 in five primary/elementary schools, one middle school, and one senior high school. The staff consists of 450 employees, including teachers, teaching assistants, clerical, maintenance, and other support personnel. All dependent children who live with their military sponsors aboard Camp Lejeune are eligible to attend the CLDS. The schools are located in or near housing areas on the base, facilitating the CLDS's strong emphasis upon parental involvement. More than 500 parents serve as volunteers, strengthening all aspects of the CLDS educational program.

The Mission of CLDS is to "provide educational opportunities for military dependent students, utilizing progressive practices, thus enabling students to become successful citizens in tomorrow's global community" (CLDS Mission Statement). The CLDS teachers and administrators engage in setting annual goals and objectives and participate in planning budget expenditures through Planning, Programming Budgeting System (PPBS). Teaching teams,

teacher advisory groups, and curriculum councils allow teachers to participate in the decision-making process. Site-based school improvement teams were being established during the 1989-90 school year. In 1987-88 and again in 1988-89, a CLDS school was recognized by the US Department of Education as a National School of Excellence.

SUBJECTS

In Spring 1989, the Superintendent of CLDS endorsed a school improvement project to increase teacher participation in decision making at the school site. The Superintendent and researchers selected schools representing primary, elementary and high school levels. Four CLDS principals agreed to participate and to select a team of teachers to work collaboratively with them in a school improvement goal during the 1989-90 school year. Due to funding limitations, three remaining schools in the system were not asked to participate. All non-participating schools had recently been involved in school improvement efforts.

The participating schools were: (1) Tarawa Terrace One (TT1): Grades K-2; 535 students; 37 faculty members. TT1 is located in an enlisted personnel's housing area. Most TT1 students are the children of enlisted personnel. (2) Tarawa Terrace Two (TT2): Grades 3-6, with a large number of exceptional education programs housed at the school: 557 students; 38 faculty members. TT2, located in an enlisted personnel's housing area, serves primarily the children of enlisted personnel and all CLDS sixth grade students. (3) Berkeley Manor: Grades K-5; 630 students; 42 faculty members. Berkeley Manor is located in a housing area for non-commissioned officers. (4) Lejeune High School (LHS): Grades 9-12; 527 students; 60 faculty members and all high school students in the CLDS.

There were 24 regular CLDS participants in the four SIGNs (19 teachers and 5 administrators); Racial composition: 5 black, 19 white; Gender composition: 5 male, 19 female. Additional fairly regular participants included: 1 site coordinator (observer/evaluator with CLDS); 1 project director (Professor at UNCG); 3 college professors (UNCG, West Georgia College, and East Carolina University); 1 part-time graduate assistant (UNCG). Teams invited

other teachers to attend and participate on occasion; other school-site persons (n=10) visited periodically.

RESEARCH ISSUES: DESIGN, VALIDITY, RELIABILITY

Since its purpose was to describe and explain a process (SIGN) rather than to seek a cause-effect relationship between variables that lend themselves to manipulation and control, this study was primarily non-experimental and qualitative. Merriam (1988) describes qualitative research as being "flexible, evolving, and emergent," the sample as being "small, non-random, and theoretical," the researcher as being "the primary instrument," and the mode of analysis as being "inductive" (p. 18). The study of the SIGN process can be described as a naturalistic case study in that it was based on an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a social unit or phenomenon" (Merriam, p. 23) that leads to sociocultural interpretation.

Case study design was the primary means for investigating the SIGN process because it offered the best means for exploring a complex educational and social process. Merriam (1988) states that "because of its strengths, case study is a particularly appealing design for applied fields of study such as education" (p. 23). The case study allows the investigation of real situations rather than highly controlled, experimental settings. Case study allows consideration of many variables at once, rather than limited, isolated variables. Results of case studies advance knowledge about a field of study as researchers describe and interpret phenomena in a rich, holistic way. When educational change or improvement is the focus, case study design is particularly appropriate because it involves the examination and understanding of real programs, processes, and problems (Merriam, 1988).

Case study design has limitations. It can be expensive and time consuming. There is a danger of producing too much information to be of practical use. The skill and knowledge of the researcher are particularly critical since the researcher is the primary instrument and must make decisions about what to study and report. Case studies may be presented, or viewed, as the whole picture rather than as just one part of a complex situation (Merriam, 1988).

Reliability, validity, and generalizability of case study research are issues of debate among researchers. Merriam (1988) questions the notion of reality as a "single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed and measured" (p. 167) and points out that "one of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing" (p. 167).

In qualitative research, internal validity (how well research findings represent reality) can be ensured through triangulation; member checks; long-term, on-site or repeated participatory research; and acknowledging and clarifying the researcher's biases (Merriam, 1988). The SIGN project made use of multiple data sources and methods (triangulation); member checks; long-term, on-site observation; and participatory research to address internal validity.

Reliability, in the traditional sense, refers to the extent to which a study can be replicated, and also depends on a reality that is static and unchanging. Exact replication is not a useful concept in qualitative research since this kind of research is not intended to establish causation but rather to establish representations that can be interpreted and applied by the various consumers of the research. "Dependability" or "consistency" are more useful terms in qualitative research and simply mean that consumers agree that the results make sense, given the data available (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Merriam, 1988). Questions of reliability in the SIGN study focused on the dependability or consistency of the results. These issues were addressed by a thorough explanation of: (1) assumptions and theories underlying the study; (2) procedures and social context of the study; and (3) multiple methods of data collection.

The concept of external validity, or generalizability, in qualitative research also differs from that concept for quantitative research. Case study research is undertaken to investigate one particular phenomenon, not to study many phenomena and making generalizations. Merriam describes four reconceptualizations of generalizability: working hypotheses (Cronbach, 19750: concrete universals (Erickson, 1986); naturalistic generalization (Stake, 1978); and user or reader generalizability (Wilson, 1979; Walker, 1980). The SIGN project relied on

thick description to provide the data for reader generalizability and the exploration of concrete universals.

OPERATING DETAILS/STRUCTURE

The CLDS made a large investment in Project SIGN, including (1) substitute pay so the SIGN teacher personnel could attend SIGN functions, (2) released time to the principals and other administrators could attend and participate in SIGN, (3) released time of the SIGN co-director, and (4) logistical support such as phone, audio-visual equipment and paper/supplies. Project SIGN (i.e., the school-based research grant) provided direct costs of consultants, travel (including meals, use of the Officer's Club for an away-from-school meeting site, and reimbursement for participant visitations), supplies, support materials such as the start of a professional library on "At Risk" students, and other costs.

The usual structure for each SIGN meeting after the two-day planning seminar was approximately the same, with slight variation depending upon the topic and the consultants. Basically, however, each meeting started with a critical analysis or discussions of some educational issue or article, a summary of each group's progress to date on the group goal, progress since last meeting, a statement of directions that each group would take during the current meeting, and planned activity between the current meeting and the next meeting. A major focus of each meeting was time for groups to work together. Presentations by consultants on such topics as restructuring, school improvement, change, group process, and strategic planning were scheduled throughout the day and usually occupied less than one hour. The general SIGN format followed that suggested by Keedy (1988) for teacher collegial group processes. Figure 1, the agenda for the 12/6/89 SIGN meeting, provides an example of a typical meeting. A consultant presented ideas (e.g., school restructuring strategies) at two points during the day for about 30 minutes (total).

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GROUPS NETWORK (SIGN)
AGENDA
DECEMBER 6, 1989

MEETING TIME: 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
MEETING PLACE: Regimental Room - Officers' Club

ORDER OF EVENTS

CRITIQUE: "Professional Knowledge & Reflective Practice" by Donald A. Schon." This article is in the material that you have already received. Thank you to the Berkeley Manor group for agreeing to lead this discussion.

GROUP REPORTS

GROUP DISCUSSION OF PROJECT EVALUATIONS

BREAK - COFFEE AND DANISH

SMALL GROUP WORK

LUNCH: We will eat at the Club and we all need to go through the line at the same time so the cashier can run a tab for billing purposes.

SMALL GROUP WORK

GAMEPLANS: Planning the next steps.

BUSINESS ITEMS AND CLOSURE

NOTES:
1. Be thinking of ways to spend your $500.00 per group.
2. Please return questionnaires if you haven't already.
3. Principals, please bring the choices of dates for the rest of our meetings. We need to establish our timetable now.

Figure 1. Sample of SIGN meeting structure (12/6/89 Agenda).

DATA, ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

Project SIGN is mostly about change, processes and improvement. As such, it is a continuing event; this paper only includes "results" for activities between 9/89 and 6/90. The CLDS administration has already discussed continuation and expansion with UNCG personnel. A sample of data collection instruments is in Appendix A. Co-investigators took "field notes" as unobtrusive participant observers in the SIGN process and discussed their notes at a later time. Meeting agendas, minutes, records and continuing events (e.g., meetings of teams with CLDS administration to present ideas and discuss/negotiate changes) contain the "real stuff" of SIGN. Table 1 summarizes the 13 SIGN sessions and shows corresponding dates, facilitators and major topics and events for each session.

INITIAL GOAL SELECTION/CHANGE AND EXPANSION

Each of the four SIGN school teams selected an initial goal by the end of the two-day seminar. (Some made changes or added goals as the year progressed.) One task for the higher education consultants was to obtain resources (e.g., bibliographies, prior research, ideas) to help each group. The original goals, by school, were as shown in Table 2. Some goal accommodation was evident as teams actively implemented and evaluated their plans. Table 2 also lists some of the changes and outcomes for SIGN efforts at each school.

OUTCOMES

Some SIGN projects resulted in "paper" products. TT1 has a 5-year strategic plan; Berkeley Manor has a written statement of expected student outcomes, an "on-the-wall" curriculum and a written proposal to Dr. Sloan for increased team planning time; LHS has a proposal for a new governance structure; TT2 has surveys from parents about parent meetings. These products are evidence of progress toward, or completion of, goals.

PROCESS NOTES

SIGN was primarily a study of processes, and secondarily a study of products. Outcomes of SIGN, for school operation and for identifiable changes in student services, were apparent and

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GROUPS NETWORK
1989-90

NOTE: Each meeting began with an article critique and/or progress report, ended with a gameplan, and provided time for large group and small group work. All events were day long except those marked with *. The two-day meeting was held at Atlantic Beach, regular meeting were held at the Officers' Club, and other meetings were held in the schools.

DATE	FACILITATORS	TOPICS/EVENTS
*10/13/89	Achilles Gaines	SIGN background, school reform, Teacher Collegial Groups (TCGs), instructional leadership, shared decision making (SDM), site-based management (SBM), school goals.
11/8/89- 11/9/89	Achilles Brubaker Keedy Gaines	SBM, instructional leadership, SDM, personal leadership, feedback, TCGs.
12/6/89	Achilles Gaines	Project evaluations, **school project topics (students at risk strategic planning, learner outcomes, shared planning time, school management teams).
*1/9/90	Gaines	Project funds, communication of SIGN projects within CLDS, ** school project topics.
2/16/90	Achilles Gaines	School reform and restructuring, change, class size, **school project topics.
*2/26/90	Gaines	Presentations of group projects to CLDS administrators by SIGN groups.
3/13/90	Bell Gaines	Systems theory, strategic planning, site-based management, organizational culture, program evaluation, professionalism, feedback on SIGN data collection.
4/3/90	Achilles Gaines	Site visits to participating schools.
4/20/90	Achilles Sloan Brubaker Gaines	Participatory school-site management, project evaluation **school project topics.
5/1/90	Bell Gaines	**School project topics
6/5/90	Achilles Gaines	SIGN evaluations, data collection, project presentations, certificate presentation.
6/8/90	Bell Gaines	Consensus building with High School SIGN team.
*6/14/90	Gaines	System wide recognition of SIGN participants.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF ORIGINAL SIGN GOAL FOR EACH SCHOOL, GOAL REVISIONS, AND SOME PROGRESS/PROCESS/AND RESULTS. (SIGN, 1989-1990)

School and Original SIGN Goal	Goal Refinements and/or Revisions	Selected SIGN Outcomes for Refined/Expanded Goals (by School)
TARAWA TERRACE 2 (TT2) School-based intervention for at-risk pupils; Grades 3-6; 5 Team members.	Establish library and resources for "at-risk" intervention; Parent involvement.	Parent meetings (establishing contact and support). Beginning of an at-risk library (for future use by all teachers/parents). Involvement of other teachers in SIGN and helping them with at-risk cards (increasing support and knowledge of all teachers).
LEJEUNE HIGH SCHOOL Setting high student expectations; Grades 9-12; 6 Team members.	Communication; Governance shared decisions.	Presentation to faculty meeting (introducing the idea). Team meetings attended (selling the idea). Meeting with Dr. Brubaker and Dr. Hager (clarifying positions).
TARAWA TERRACE 1 (TT1) Plan for comprehensive school improvement; Grades K-2; 7 Team members (Refine plan for National Recognition).	Plan for school change from K-2.	Application for school of excellence (self-study). Meeting with Dr. Sloan and proposal for remaining K-2 (change, negotiation). Trips to the school in Durham (networking with other schools, sharing knowledge about developmental classes).
BERKELEY MANOR A means to communicate among grade levels re: curriculum; Grades K-4; 4 Team members.	Plan ways to get staff time for expanding SIGN-type in-service.	Explorations-Supermarket Science (introducing the idea about team planning time; negotiation with other teachers; hands-on learning about change). Information from other schools about "early dismissal" (from the local system to the big picture).

analyzed. At the third (12/6/89) and at the final meetings (6/6/90) participants responded to five open-ended questions on a "SIGN Progress Report." A summary of the five questions and the numbers of responses are shown in Table 3.

Researchers reviewed and categorized the responses. Some items received more than one response on a response sheet. In December (the "pretest") some teams compiled the ideas into one response sheet; in June ("post test") each respondent chose to do a single response sheet. For ease of comparison, Table 3 shows both the number (n) of responses and the roundec percents (%) based on the 12/89 responses (N=7) and 6/90 responses (n=21).

Generally, at both pre and post, the groups and individuals had positive regard for SIGN. Consistently positive comments were made about the mix/structure of the group and about the meeting format (especially meeting away from school) The participants also made consistently positive comments about the communication, support, feedback idea sharing, teamwork and goal accomplishment. Of particular interest were comments (almost all positive) that reflected strengths of SIGN as an in-service strategy [relative to the Daresh and LaPlant (1984) guidelines for effective in-service] and the value of including the administrator in the group. The comment, "We need the administrator present to do this because of the knowledge/expertise she has re: policy. . ." expresses the view well.

Table 3. Summary of SIGN Progress as Reported in 12/6/89 (n-7) and 6/6/90 (n-21) by Responses to Five Open-Ended Questions

Questions	Value	Response Category Summary (some examples included)	Number of Responses* 12/89 (n=7)		6/90 (n=21)	
			n	%	n	%
1. Structure of School Teams	Positive	Worked Well, Good	2	29	4	19
		Good Mix (Adm., etc.)	5	71	11	52
		Each Grade Level Incl.	1	14	6	29
	Negative	Select. Process (elect vs select)	1	14	1	5
		Adm. Dominance/More Open	2	29	--	--
		Adm. Should Attend	1	14	--	--
		Overlap with C.O.R.E.	--	--	4	19
		Must Have OK Mix	--	--	5	24
2. Structure of Large Group	Positive	Good Mix/Structure	6	86	15	71
		Good Communication	1	14	8	38
		FUN	--	--	2	10
		"Univ. Added Breadth; Adm. dropped in and added; Learned new ways of organizing and working"				
	Negative	Should be one level (Elem)	--	--	1	5
		Need more time/better mix	--	--	2	10
		Repetitious	1	14	--	--
		More Univ. persons	1	14	--	--
3. Meeting Format	Positive	Good. 2-day was great.	5	71	13	62
		Away from School	5	71	14	67
		Allows Communication/Sharing	--	--	9	43
	Negative	More time for indiv. work "Fewer Lectures"	2	29	2	10
4. Functions of Your Team	Positive	Identify Goals	5	71	--	--
		Accomplish Goals	2	29	11	52
		Good Goals	--	--	5	24
		Teamwork	1	14	10	48
		Evolving Process	--	--	3	14
	Negative	Overlap with CORE Team already in place	2	29	3	14
		Need More Persons	1	14	--	--
		Difficult to achieve/implement goal	1	14	3	14
5. Function of Large Group	Positive	Feedback/Support	5	71	14	67
		Idea Sharing	2	29	15	71
		Getting Better (Evolving)	--	29	--	--
	Negative	More Interacting among Groups	--	--	3	14

*On 12/6 most teams turned in one consolidated sheet; on 6/6/90 each individual chose to submit a form. (This may say something about personal growth and security.) Researchers developed categories through content analysis.

SIGN SCHOOL-BY-SCHOOL RESULTS

This section provides a school-by-school summary of concrete, observable SIGN results (products). These results were observed and also reported by the SIGN teams at year end.

BERKELEY MANOR: The Berkeley Manor SIGN team's original goal was to develop an "on-the-wall" curriculum to facilitate communication about expected learner outcomes. Working with established teacher teams in the school, they achieved this outcome. The team found that their project anticipated a system-wide goal that was implemented during the school year. All seven schools in the system developed learner outcomes that were consolidated into a system-wide document. The Berkeley Manor Team reported that both teachers and students benefitted directly from a clear definition of learner expectations. An unexpected outcome of the SIGN project at Berkeley Manor was that the team members realized the need for shared planning time to complete the learner outcomes project. This lead to an immediate solution proposed by the Special Areas Team in the school that resulted in a "Supermarket Science" exploratory for students. The exploratory gave teachers the planning time they needed to complete the learner outcomes project. In addition, the SIGN team researched and developed a proposal for an early release time for planning purposes. The team would have benefited by having more members and by increasing the awareness of SIGN in the rest of the school faculty. The team felt that released time for participants away from the school site was an essential part of the SIGN project.

LEJEUNE HIGH SCHOOL. Lejeune High School SIGN members sought to implement a new, more participatory structure for planning and governance at the school. By year's end the team had communicated the goal and established support for the project. A body of teacher participants was elected and, with the principal and assistant principal, received training in consensus building. The SIGN team struggled with this ambitious project throughout the school year and experienced feelings of uncertainty and frustration with difficulties they encountered. The members gained first-hand experience with how change occurs in an organization and are now aware of the considerable progress they made. They have a solid beginning for the next school year and would like to see greater involvement of the administration in the team's activities. The team reported that teachers in the school benefited by an improvement in morale and that students, parents, and teachers will benefit more when the committee is in operation. They would improve their committee by increasing the administration's confidence in their decision making skills and by reducing the political aspects of implementing change. Essential components of the SIGN process were: time to develop trust among members; freedom to have off-site meetings; continual feedback to the faculty; and openness of discussion among members. A significant outcome of SIGN was that it became institutionalized in CLDS. The LHS team learned that communication is a key element in a small-group environment.

TARAWA TERRACE 1. TT1's goal was to develop a five-year comprehensive school improvement plan. The team started with a self analysis/needs assessment and ended the school year with the written improvement plan. They came to SIGN with a strong sense of purpose and prior experience working together. Camaraderie was high and the principal functioned as a strong leader in this group. The team morale remained high even when some of their recommendations were not approved by the central administration. They learned that the superintendent is open and receptive to proposals although he may sometimes reject them in the interest of broader, system-wide considerations. The team also learned about collaboration and planning on both the school and system level. They used the self-knowledge gained through SIGN to improve their school's climate by an increased emphasis on wellness. They planned a professional library for the school. TT1 SIGN felt that university support and released time away from school were essential project components. They discovered that developing a five-year plan in an overwhelming task. Another unexpected result of SIGN was that a teacher in the school who was

not on the SIGN team started a student school improvement team to survey staff and other students in this K-2 school about needed improvement.

TARAWA TERRACE 2. TT2 School's goal was to prevent the academic failure of students at risk. This goal grew out of work the previous year with the TT2 CORE team. Through SIGN, the team identified students at risk, completed referrals on these students to the CORE team, and planned intervention strategies. They successfully involved other teachers in the school an approved in-service workshops on at-risk interventions. They held three parent meetings to increase parent awareness and involvement. The SIGN team was happy to discover that they could use SIGN money to start a professional library of materials on at-risk students. Dr. Rita O'Sullivan at UNCG provided the initial list of materials. Testing in the spring revealed a lower percentage of at-risk students than in the previous fall. The SIGN team reported that student achievement resulted in improved self-esteem. Some students were removed from the at-risk classification. Parents grew through increase knowledge of their children and had a stronger feeling of usefulness. The System benefited from progress toward its goal of improved student achievement. The TT2 SIGN team felt that they would have benefited from more knowledge of SIGN objectives prior to goal selection so that SIGN and CORE committees would not overlap. They reported that open communication and wide representation of teachers (grade/area) were important SIGN components. The team was especially gratified at the depth of parent interest in the at-risk program and at the bonds and communication established between parents and students. Although TT2 had reservations about the overlap of SIGN and CORE, the result of their effort was wide involvement of parents, teachers, and students in the at-risk project.

OTHER OUTCOMES (Instrument and Questions in Appendix A, pp. A6-A7).

Program evaluations completed by participants indicate clearly that SIGN members experienced strong feelings of involvement and efficacy in connection with their work on the project. They reported that SIGN was more collegial, productive, and effective than traditional in-service approaches. They appreciated that projects were selected by school-based teams but recognized the support received from the central office. According to participant responses, the structure and process promoted teacher participation, open and honest communication, the formation of networks to achieve common goals, and the opportunity to develop "experts" within the school groups. Participants also valued the long-term nature of the project accompanied by periodic follow-up leading to "real change." They appreciated being provided targeted or selected articles/materials relating to SIGN tasks (see Appendix B). They felt that time away from the school site was essential to getting the job done with minimum time lost due to interruptions characteristic of the school day. Written and spoken comments conveyed a true sense of involvement in processes that "made a difference" in the schools. Throughout the year,

teachers voiced their desire to be involved in activities that had a real effect on school practices and policies.

Eleven respondents felt that SIGN had helped principals develop strategies for instructional leadership, six disagreed with this, and five felt that it was not applicable to their situations. Reasons given for disagreement were: teachers are often the instructional leaders and principals are sometimes followers in this area; some principals may not have taken advantage of opportunities for instructional leadership provided by SIGN or are already strong in instructional leadership and did not necessarily improve due to SIGN.

Twenty (of 21) respondents agreed that SIGN had reduced isolation and increased collaboration to improve instruction. One person did not respond to this item. Specifically, participants valued the time to work with members of their own school teams in an uninterrupted fashion, as well as the time to work with participants from other schools, grade levels, and subject areas. They recognized the value of identifying goals, planning, and sharing information and new ideas through this process and felt that all schools in the system should be included. They felt that the input and facilitation by university personnel was a strong component of the SIGN process, as was the support of the CLDS central administration. Some respondents felt that more emphasis should be placed on the "professional dialogue" made possible by SIGN.

The opportunity for collegial/collaborative interaction was listed by eleven participants as the single most important result of SIGN. Nine respondents felt that time to work toward a common goal was the most important result, while eight listed empowerment as most important. Trust building, time, and the opportunity for uninterrupted work away from the school site were each listed in this category.

All respondents except one felt that SIGN would have lasting results even if it were not continued. One felt that SIGN would not have lasting results unless it continued. The largest number (11) felt that the lasting impact would be the result of the group projects, especially those that were implemented system-wide. Others listed possible lasting results as: openness

and sharing with colleagues (4); teachers and administrators working together as colleagues (2); teacher morale; trust; group process to use in the school setting.

DISCUSSION

Project SIGN developers posited four outcomes for project activities, and there were several serendipitous outcomes as well. Each of the four original outcomes was achieved, as demonstrated by data and discussion presented in the Final Report.

The four principals developed/improved their leadership strategies to differing degrees, as did the on-site CLDS researcher and some central office administrators. Principals participated to different degrees. One principal attended all sessions and stayed the entire time. The other extreme was one principal was attended infrequently and worked hard to set SIGN agendas and keep a one-person veto without participating much. One very supportive principal attended most sessions and encouraged the SIGN team to move as far as the team wanted. Another principal set SIGN goals, hand-picked SIGN members, and directed SIGN efforts in a particular direction. In the four SIGNS there were clearly four different leader approaches. Each SIGN far exceeded its preset goal. By the project' conclusion, all groups were operating quite smoothly; communications became more open and the groups were exploring additional ideas/goals beyond those originally specified.

There were several observable changes in schools. These included such things as new ways to deal with at-risk pupils, increased parent involvement, use of research ideas and a new professional library, new structure for school-wide planning and governance, ideas for expanded planning time and innovative use of special teachers to free up time for group planning, plans for changing from one grade level grouping to another, student involvement in school improvement, more clearly stated exit skills by grade level, five-year plan, and others. Several SIGN ideas expanded to the entire system: SIGN-type groups in each CLDS school (1990-91), specification of exit skills for each grade level, and a proposal for finding ways to build planning time into the work schedule.

The entire process was a demonstration of a new type of in-service which met the points suggested by Daresh and LaPlant (1984). (See Appendix C) The SIGN emphasis was on continuity [accomplish a major goal through a series of "gameplans" (Keedy, 1988), and share progress among groups]. The SIGN groups worked on site-specific goals, often seeking ideas and resources from the higher education partners. SIGN teams expanded their impact by taking ideas back to other faculty, inviting faculty to visit SIGN meetings, and by presenting their ideas to the CLDS central administration. This process helped the central administration recognize the problem-finding/problem-solving skills of teachers and strengthened administrative receptivity to SIGN ideas. Being away from the school site and treated as professionals (Grumet, 1988) increased teacher feelings of efficacy and built the in-service into an active process (Daresh and LaPlant, 1984).

The SIGN process was built so as to reduce teacher isolation, increase collaboration and improve instruction. The meeting site and structure are evidence of success. The improved student outcomes (e.g., the at-risk effort at TT2), the development of grade-level outcomes, the new governance structure, the work of SIGN back at school sites to involve other faculty, and the Explorations event are examples of collaboration, reduction of teacher isolation and improved instruction. The CLDS plan to develop SIGN-like groups in each school in 1990-91 is evidence of the potential for lasting change built upon SIGN processes.

If the researchers started again, they would change some things. Examples include:

1) More planning with central office.
2) More information to site-level personnel about SIGN processes and objectives.
3) Suggestion that SIGN at least consider a focus on any major planned change (e.g., the move into a new building) as a way of supporting and smoothing over imminent concerns.
4) More detailed suggestions for a) forming SIGN site-level teams, 2) determining goal-setting processes, and 3) building problem-finding skills.

The growth of individual teachers was apparent in several areas. Some reticent ones struggled and succeeded in becoming more proactive and vocal. Some very outspoken ones struggled to be less cynical and more positive. Most struggled with realities of leadership --

negotiation, compromise, accepting the responsibility for decisions, disappointments with goals, skepticism from those you are trying to help, differing views on what "help" means, and ineffective communication. For many teachers, this was a first opportunity to "walk a mile" in a principal's shoes and to understand the frequent frustrations of leadership.

An early and persistent concern that emerged in the SIGN groups was that of pleasing the superintendent. Although teachers may sometimes feel a need for changes in the way things are done, most feel fortunate to work in CLDS and are unsure of how to deal with the issue of communicating their concerns without seeming to be ungrateful. The superintendent became aware of this and was somewhat surprised that it was an issue. In his view, concerns cannot be dealt with unless they are expressed. Once expressed, a dialogue can explore differing positions. The interesting dilemma is that the teachers desire this professional dialogue but are reluctant to initiate it with the superintendent, the very person they view as being the key to possible changes. The role of principals in this matter can not be overstated. In some schools the principal clearly took the initiative and either gave direction or participated in initiating the dialogue with the superintendent. The teachers in these groups learned that the superintendent was approachable even though he may not always support or agree with their requests.

The role of the principal in the group process was another issue that created concerns for the teacher participants. The large-group process of SIGN (having multiple school teams working simultaneously in the same location) made differences in leadership styles and practices obvious to teachers. Some teachers noted these differences and commented, almost jealously, that their principal was not as participative, that their principal was too directive, that they would have to "work around" their principal. Most often, these teachers were not disturbed, but instead were noting the differences.

Another SBM issue that arose was the role of central office coordinators. Coordinators were not at first included in SIGN meetings. As SIGN progressed, most coordinators expressed curiosity (at varying levels) and were invited to participate. Those who accepted the invitation helped the groups. It is apparent that SBM initiatives will bring a new role for central office

coordinators. Instead of always introducing innovations, they may more frequently find themselves on the receiving end of requests for assistance with changes initiated at the school level. The large group structure and process of SIGN make it an ideal environment for the coordinators to access and interact efficiently with school improvement teams in all schools. The coordinator's role will evolve as site-based management efforts continue.

Finally, SIGN provided an opportunity for teachers who were compelled to be involved in activities that "really made a difference." This issue came up time and time again. They simply wanted to have an impact, a "voice" and a "hand" in issues they felt were important. SIGN provided the means for the "voice" and the "hand." Teachers appreciated this and maintained their sense of purpose even when the going was tough. Back in the schools, the site coordinator was frequently confronted by individual SIGN participants (teachers and principals) talking excitedly about their projects and accomplishments. These unexpected glimpses, these SIGNs of energy taken back to the schools and shared with others, were perhaps the most gratifying results of the SIGN project.

In general, the SIGN co-directors consider the SIGN project a success as developed and operated. The formal outcomes, many of which are included in this report, are strong evidence of success. Many informal outcomes may be more important. These include the cumulative effects of what participants learned, pupil benefits of improvements in curriculum and instruction, energizing of new change efforts that will continue. . . Project SIGN may be just Act I of a detailed drama. Time will tell.

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SIGN PROGRESS REPORT

DATE:_____

One of the goals of the SIGN Project is to develop a model for the structure and function of a group made up of school teams (administrators and teachers) and university personnel that work collaboratively to address school issues. The group has essentially two functions: (1) to identify and implement goals in individual schools, and (2) to provide feedback and support for teams from other schools. Please list below your suggestions and observations on the following topics:

1. The structure of the the school teams (They were structured differently in each school. Please comment on your team or any of the others):

2. The structure of the large group (school teams consisting of teachers & administrators and university personnel):

3. The format of the meetings (a two-day workshop followed by whole day meetings, away from the work site, more group discussion rather than presentations, interaction with university personnel, etc):

4. The function of your school team (identifying and implementing school goals):

5. The function of the large group (feedback, support, critique):

DECISION SHARING GRID

You have 10 points to distribute among the different stakeholders for each decision according to how much influence you think each party has on that decision. You may place any value in the space under each stakeholder but each decision row must equal a total of 10 points. Feel free to fill in other decisions and stakeholders THIS IS FOR PRACTICE & EXAMPLE ONLY.

STAKEHOLDERS

DECISIONS	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	PRIN/VP	C.O.	SCH.BRD.	
OPERATIONAL/CLASSROOM DECISIONS						
how to teach						
what to teach						
STRATEGIC SCHOOL DECISIONS						
curriculum						
budget						
personnel						
STRATEGIC/OPERATIONAL INTERFACE						
assign.stdnts						
assign.tchrs						
discipl. policy						
promotion policy						

DECISION SHARING GRID

PLEASE FILL IN STAKEHOLDERS & DECISIONS APPROPRIATE TO YOUR SCHOOLS NEEDS.You have _____ points to distribute among the different stakeholders for each decision according to how much influence you think each party has on that decision. You may place any value in the space under each stakeholder but each decision row must equal a total of ___points. The short lines are to categorize decisions if you wish. THIS IS FOR PRACTICE.

STAKEHOLDERS

DECISIONS						

SIGN INDIVIDUAL PROJECT EVALUATIONS
(use additional sheets if necessary)

DATE:_____ SCHOOL:_____

1. The goal of our school's SIGN project is:

_____

_____

_____

2. The results and evidences (outcomes, products, processes, or events) that we intended by setting this goal were:

RESULTS EVIDENCES

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. The results (with evidences) that we obtained by working toward this goal were:

RESULTS EVIDENCES

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Who benefited and how did they benefit from work done towards this goal (the school system, the school, teachers, administrators, students, parents, etc.)?

5. Was the goal completely or partially met? _____

a. If partially met, to what degree was it met? _____

b. If partially met, what remains to be done? _____

6. What, if anything, about the project would your group change?

7. What components of the project are essential and should not be changed?

8. What are the most significant <u>unexpected</u> things your SIGN team learned from working on this goal? OR What were the most significant <u>unexpected</u> outcomes of your project?

Date:_____

Please answer the following questions: (use the back of the page if necessary)

1. Do you work best alone or with a group?

2. Compare and contrast the SIGN approach to in-service and professional development with traditional in-service approaches.

3. Describe briefly the most effective in-service experience you have had as an educator.

4. Describe briefly your reactions to the following statements. Please include reasons for your reactions.

a. The SIGN process that we have participated in this year has helped in the development of strategies for instructional leadership by principals (or assistant principals) in the group.

Social Security #:_____

Date:_____

b. The SIGN process that we have participated in this year has helped to reduce teacher isolation and to increase collaboration to improve instruction.

5. If you were to participate in this process next year, what would you want to see changed and why?

6. What do you see as the single most important result of the SIGN process?

7. If SIGN is not continued next year, do you think there will be any lasting results from what we have done this year? If yes, what do you think these results will be?

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GROUPS NETWORK

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APPENDIX C

COMPARISON OF SIGN WITH CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE IN-SERVICE PRACTICES (DARESH AND LAPLANT, 1984)

Daresh & LaPlant	SIGN
1. Effective in-service is directed toward local school needs.	1. SIGN needs were identified by site-based teams.
2. In-service participants are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs.	2. SIGN participants planned, implemented, and evaluated their own improvement projects, assisted by consultants.
3. Effective in-service is based on participant needs.	3. SIGN teams identified their own needs.
4. Active learning processes, rather than passive techniques such as lectures, characterize effective in-service instruction.	4. SIGN teams actively implemented their plans and constantly updated them during the school year. Lectures were only a minimal part of the SIGN process.
5. In-service that is part of a long-term systematic staff development plan is more effective than a "one-shot," short-term program.	5. SIGN was carried out for an entire school year and will expand and continue during the following year.
6. Effective local school in-service is supported by a commitment of resources from the central office.	6. The central office committed substantial support in the form of substitute pay, released time for participants and co-director, and logistical support.
7. Effective in-service provides evidence of quality control and is delivered by competent presenters.	7. SIGN presenters were university professors with expertise in the subject areas. SIGN participants and presenters monitored the progress of projects.
8. Programs that enable participants to share ideas and provide assistance to one another are viewed as successful.	8. A particularly strong component of SIGN was the emphasis on professional collaboration, feedback, and assistance.
9. In-service programs are effective when they are designed so that individual participant needs, interests, and concerns are addressed.	9. Individual participants received renewal credit as well as considerable reduction in feelings or professional isolation. Needs identified were school-centered rather than focused on the individual.

10. Rewards and incentives, both intrinsic and extrinsic, are evident to program participants.	10. Feedback from SIGN participants indicates awareness of both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and a desire for SIGN to continue.
11. In-service activities are provided during school time.	11. SIGN was carried out during school time.
12. Effective in-service is accompanied by ongoing evaluation.	12. Informal up-dating occurred at each meeting, with more formal evaluation conducted periodically throughout the year and at the end of the year.